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ABSTRACT

This paper describes a project at Columbus State University (Columbus, Georgia) to have students in the School of Education develop an electronic resume. A grant proposal was written which requested laptops for the development of electronic portfolios, and funding was received. Student participants were selected and were provided with Macintosh laptops. The rules for use of the laptop stress the responsibility of the student to take advantage of the portable nature of the machine and to provide security for the unit. The new user is provided with e-mail and Internet access in conjunction with a session on how to access the campus LAN system. As the participant was introduced to the classroom, in the course of student teaching, the importance of the variety of activities were stressed as those which might be used as examples of skills and achievement to be included in the portfolio. The student is encouraged to be creative in the development of the portfolio in an effort to reflect individuality. During lab sessions, each participant is encouraged to use the laptop as a means to facilitate the mastery of new skills in the use of applicable software packages. Digital cameras with appropriate software are used to capture such things as classroom activities, bulletin boards and other display items. As the quarter progresses, the participants work on incorporating the selected samples into the electronic portfolio and at the same time, increasing their skills in the use of the software application of choice. At the conclusion of the quarter, participants present their finished product to the group. (AEF)

Supporting Student Teachers with Laptop Computers: A Project of the School of Education at Columbus State University

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Three Years ago my colleague and I were encouraged to investigate the concept of electronic portfolios for use in education by our Dean, Dr. Arthur Justice. A search of research data bases, investigations on the net, and inquiries on the Web and to professionals at meetings were conducted. We found that there was very little information available on the topic. As a result of the findings, we became intrigued with the development of electronic portfolios. Being considered one of the pioneers in the area also appealed to us. Initially, the exploration of this means of organizing and presenting the accomplishments of our students was an effort to help them develop an unusual resume. As we worked with the students, all we could provide them with was a session that provided exclusive use of the computer lab in the School of Education. We set up a special night, and Saturday morning hours for them to have exclusive use of the facilities and have special instruction in any new technology which might be made available.

The major difficulty of the participants having time to work on the design of their electronic resume was complicated by the fact that we needed a common carrier for the design. The Hypercard software which we were using did not provide the desired color nor desirable special effects features, so another package, Digital Chisel, was selected. The flexible license for this software made it possible for us to load it on as many machines as we owned or purchased. In addition, the license provided that we could let the students in the School of Education load it on their own machines at home as long as they were in the program. With the potential to load Digital Chisel on any number of machines, it was most attractive for us to try to acquire additional computers. At this point, we began to look at the type computer we might wish to acquire, as well as where we might house them. As with many academic settings, we had very little flexible space in which to house a new lab, and inadequate security to share the space with existing classes.

At this point, the flexibility of laptops was considered. With this type computer, we could easily store the units when not in use: provide usable space in almost any office, classroom, or lounge area; and increase the potential use of each machine. In addition, the units could go with the student into the classroom and do double service there, helping the student teacher with classroom management tasks, and providing an example of technology use. Classroom teachers could see what this technology might do, selected software could be loaded on for use by the student teacher in the teaching environment, and software could be previewed at leisure by both the student teacher and supervising teacher. When not in use by student teachers, the laptops could be made available for professional support for research work since each would have internet access software, loaded with

presentation software, it would be used with LCD projection equipment to share with audiences. This would make it possible for faculty to prepare and present more interesting presentations.

The case being built, we engaged in the activity of writing a grant proposal to the Georgia Public Service Commission who was administering funding. In approaching the PSC for funding, we had to address a need and outcome that would be viewed as worthy of the allocation. Choosing to request laptops for the development of electronic portfolios and as means of providing student teachers with portable technology seemed to fit the criteria, and we received the funding.

Our labs for the School of Education were Macintosh, so it was natural that we selected Macintosh laptops for the project. An attractive "bundle" pricing helped in getting more machines than initially expected. The grant provided enough to purchase 15 laptops. This would not service all the student teachers we had each quarter, but it would provide a good base to identify a select group to receive this support.

Beginning with the receipt of the units, the plan for selection of participants had to be established. Basically, the students had to have completed our basic computer applications course, exhibited mastery of a presentation package, demonstrate ability to be self motivated and directed, and express a desire to be part of the project. Names of all students who fit the criteria were then put in the pool and after deliberation, those selected were notified. Those chosen had to respond with an indication of interest and commitment to complete the project. From those, the final participants were selected. The first meeting date was set up to allow time to go over the rules for use of the laptop, operation of the laptop, setting lab usage times, and signing necessary paperwork for loan of the equipment.

The rules for use of the laptop stress the responsibility of the student to take advantage of the portable nature of the machine and to provide security for the unit. The features of the laptop make it a high security risk. There was also the factor of the nature of the machine that made it necessary to stress the fact that the laptops were intended for use by the student teacher and not other members of the family or friends. The new user is provided with e-mail and internet access in conjunction with a session on how to access the campus LAN system. The Macintosh 520 was equipped with modem and connection software for our campus LAN system which provided the user with either Pegasus or Eudora for e-mail and Netscape. This provides the student teacher with *access* to faculty, library resources, and the world wide web from any phone plug, and at no cost for the service. The savings in connectivity was at least $19.95 for each of the three months of student teaching. Each laptop was loaded with two presentation packages, such as, Digital Chisel, HyperStudio, or PowerPoint. Additionally, the software included Microsoft Works and a varied selection of software which the individual user may need depending on grade level and subject matter needs.

As the participant was introduced to the classroom, in the course of student teaching, the importance of the variety of activities were stressed as those which might be selected for consideration as excellent examples of skills and achievement to be included in the portfolio. The student is encouraged to be creative in the development of the portfolio in an effort to reflect individuality. Also, diverse appearance made each selection seem more customized and increases interest on the part of the viewer, particularly as more of these portfolios reach the desks of area principals and hiring agents.

The participant is encouraged to practice, not only the computer skills he/she has learned, but to experiment in the use in a variety of ways. For example, the use of Microsoft Works Wizard for a newsletter may also be used for page size poster, notice, or presentation cover. Exploration of various productive software packages may add to the possible sources of curriculum support materials, as well as. potential examples for inclusion the portfolio.

During the lab sessions, each participant is encouraged to use the laptop as a means to facilitate the mastery of new skills in the use of applicable software packages. Digital cameras with appropriate software are used to capture such things as classroom activities, bulletin boards and other display items. The use of student portraits for inclusion in newsletters, as a means of identification, and for classroom decoration are covered. Learning how to use projection systems, composite projectors, LCD panels, and tv-ators, increases the effective usage of the laptops. Digitizing tables provide an added dimension for creating visual materials and adding impact to the creations of the user.

As the quarter progresses, the participants work on incorporating the selected samples into the electronic portfolio and at the same time, increasing their skills in the use of the software application of choice. This helped the students in the development of a more sophisticated final product, as well as, perfecting the skills necessary to the mastery of this form of technology. At all points along the way, the students were encouraged to use the capacity of e-mail to keep in touch with faculty on campus as questions needed to be answered, resources needed to be located, or appointments needed to be set up. The use of internet was used for research, setting up classroom activities, and developing resources for the units of study. Locating lesson plans on the internet was also addressed as a use of resources.

At the conclusion of the quarter, each participant is required to present his/her finished product to the group. This showing, provided an opportunity for the participants to see how others presented their materials and get ideas for upgrading or including areas which were not considered. After the laptops are returned, the upgrades are done on desktop computers in lab or at home at any point before the student directed the final product be placed on CD-ROM.

At the end of each quarter the laptop is cleared of all extraneous programs which may have been loaded on for the use of the individual using that laptop. After checking for operation. verifying the accessories, and charging the battery, the laptop is again ready for the task of introducing a new user to the fascinating world of the laptop.

An additional use of laptop computers has been one that permits us to "trade" the use of the laptop to selected students for the purpose of providing additional lab time for class use. In an effort to expand the services of our lab, we can use this approach to "buy" the time necessary for student use. The students selected to use the laptop computers in this manner must sign an agreement that they will devote at least two hours per week to keeping the lab open and providing tutorial time to students enrolled in the basic technology courses in the School of Education. They must use the laptops for class assignments and to help in the production of class support materials, as needed. This practice has only been in operation for two quarters and the maximum participation is two students per quarter.

Again, the use of the laptops to service student needs is one that has evolved from our desire to incorporate technology into the classroom and encourage the general use of computers. Laptops are generally accepted as the near perfect means to support our program and to provide a tangible connection to the campus from the field. The e-mail and Netscape link us to the student and his/her world quickly which enhances both our jobs and facilitates the problem-solving necessary to a successful student teaching experience.

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